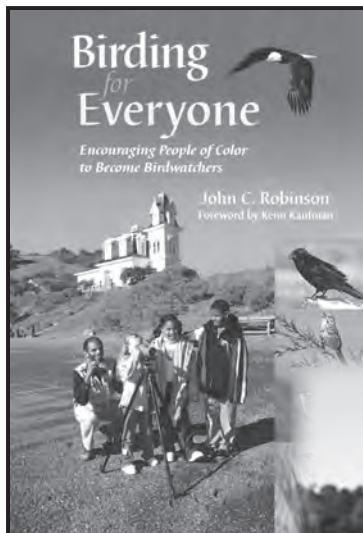


Nature Connections

News and Events from the Missouri Department of Conservation • January/February 2015



Meet award-winning
ornithologist, best-
selling author, and
wildlife biologist
John C. Robinson.
See page 5 for
details.

Your Big Year Birds of Missouri

see robins nesting in small trees or hummingbirds flitting around hanging baskets of flowers. Above, a swirl of chimney swifts may enter a tall chimney

at dusk after foraging for insects, and you may be spied by a peregrine falcon nesting on a rooftop high above as it watches for the opportunity to nab an unsuspecting pigeon. Higher still, flocks of birds may be moving to feeding areas or undertaking a seasonal migration. Listen carefully and you will hear the twitter of birds amidst the sounds of traffic. Even the lonesome hoot of a great horned owl is not uncommon in cities, especially in cemeteries



The first word my daughter uttered clearly was “duck.” (It was actually a swan-shaped planter, but it didn’t matter.) Before long, she recognized most birds by accurate names. Soon cardinal replaced “red bird” and “blue bird” was recognized as a blue jay. Birds and insects were her first introduction to the vast natural world around her because they were everywhere. While insects occasionally reviled her and were only present part of the year, birds were a welcome sight year-round. Our story is not unique; birds are always present to remind us of our connection to nature.

How often have you been someplace where birds were not present? Even caves attract phoebes at their entrance and penguins are found in the most inhospitable climates. You don’t have to travel to an exotic location to find birds, they are nearly everywhere.

Stroll through a city and you’re sure to see starlings, pigeons, and house sparrows—they are practically ubiquitous. Look closely and you may

where they find large trees for nesting.

City parks, trails, urban creeks, and woody fencerows provide habitat for a greater variety of birds. If you are lucky enough to have a backyard, you can attract birds right to your window by feeding them—an activity that arguably pleases people as much or more than it helps birds. The Springfield Conservation Nature Center, conservation areas, wildlife refuges, national forests and parks, and other public lands provide opportunities to see a huge variety of birds. Avid birdwatchers often identify well over 100 species of birds in a single day of birding.

We receive calls from people about identifying a bird they’ve never seen before. Often the bird in question is quite common. Undoubtedly, they’ll see this same bird many times in the future and wonder how they never noticed it before. You don’t need a lot of special equipment to study birds, although there is a huge industry in binoculars, spotting scopes, and other equipment. All that is

required is an *awareness* of the birds around you—notice them and listen for their calls. Identifying them is as easy as taking a photo on a cell phone, looking them up on the internet, visiting a library for a field guide, or calling a source such as the nature center or your local Audubon Society.

Gaining an interest in birds may very well be a springboard to other outdoor pursuits and can lead to a lifetime passion for birds and nature. The nature center’s own Volunteer Naturalist Charley Burwick is one such example. After receiving a Christmas gift from his daughter of a bird feeder and a field guide in 1986, he became hooked on birds. He is now active with the Audubon Society serving both locally and statewide in a variety of positions. Vacations are planned around birding hotspots and he is rarely seen without a pair of binoculars dangling around his neck.

We want you to gain an appreciation for the birds around you. While hardcore birders participate in a year-long birding competition called *A Big Year*, at the nature center we’re hosting *Your Big Year*, a much milder and shorter version of the event to learn more about Missouri birds. (See page 5 or call 417-888-4237 for details.) Individuals and families are encouraged to identify birds, attend programs, and participate in citizen science projects that provide statistical information such as *Project FeederWatch* and the *Great Backyard Bird Count*. Our 4-month event (February through May) kicks off on February 7 with a free showing of the 2011 film *The Big Year* to provide inspiration. The highlight is a visit by award-winning ornithologist and best-selling author John C. Robinson. His latest book, *Birding For Everyone: Encouraging People Of Color To Become Birdwatchers*, encourages the appreciation of nature through birding. Birds are everywhere and provide the perfect way to **Discover Nature.**

—Linda Chorce, Nature Center Manager



We are inviting everyone—family and individuals of all ages—to participate in *Your Big Year* to identify and learn more about Missouri birds. Look for this symbol for bird-related programs on page 5.

Joplin Office in the Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center

201 W. Riviera Drive, Suite B, Joplin, MO 64804 • mdc.mo.gov/node/292



The Joplin Conservation Office, located in the Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center, is your local connection to Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife. Stop by and purchase hunting and fishing permits, attend a nature program, go for a hike, enjoy a picnic, or access Shoal Creek. Within the 190 acres of Wildcat Park, you will find a diverse mix of wildlife habitats rich with flora and fauna. From I-44, take exit 6, and turn south on MO-86. Turn right on Riviera Drive to enter Wildcat Park.

HOURS:

Monday–Friday: 8 AM–5 PM
Closed all state holidays.
Audubon Center hours vary.

TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

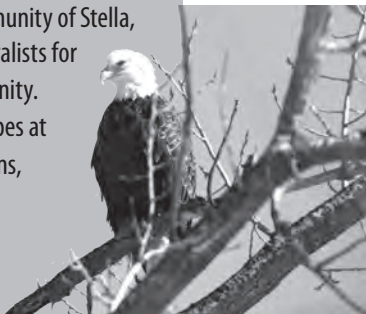
Programs are free. Call 417-629-3423 to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

Stella Eagle Day Event

January 24 • Saturday • 10 AM–3 PM
Stella Veteran's Memorial Park
(Stella)

No registration required (all ages)

The fish-filled streams of southwest Missouri are a favorite winter draw for bald eagles. Join the Joplin Conservation Office, community of Stella, and Missouri Master Naturalists for an eagle-viewing opportunity. There will be spotting scopes at designated viewing stations, educational displays, and hands-on activities for the entire family.



January and February Events

Bird Count For Kids

January 3 • Saturday • 9 AM–1 PM
Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center (Joplin)

Call 417-782-6287 to register (ages 7 and up)

Ozark Gateway Audubon Chapter will sponsor this fun-filled field experience just for kids! Seasoned birders will begin the day with a birding and binoculars boot camp to learn birding basics before going into the field. Leaders will escort teams of 6 or fewer kids to count as many species of birds as possible in 2 hours. Parents and mentors are encouraged to go along, but to let the kids identify and count the birds. We'll return to the center for bird games, a free hot lunch, and a compilation celebration to tally all the species found. Prizes will be awarded to the team with the most species and the best bird of the day. Each child will get a prize for participating. Limited binoculars and field guides will be available for those who can't bring their own. Remember to dress for the weather and be prepared to hike.



Incredible Mammals Of Missouri

January 8 • Thursday • 6–7:30 PM
Walter Woods Conservation Area (Joplin)

Registration required (ages 5 and up)
Skulls, tracks, and scat—oh my! Discover what makes a mammal a mammal and learn about the common wild critters living around your neighborhood. Join us to learn how their incredible life stories are revealed through the signs they leave behind.

Short-eared Owl Hike

January 17 • Saturday • 4:30–6 PM
Shawnee Trail Conservation Area (near Mindenmines)

Registration required (ages 7 and up)

It's winter in Missouri and short-eared owls may be seen flying low over native grasslands in search of mice, rabbits, and other small mammals. Join us during this evening hike to discover more about these and other feathered winter residents. Grab your binoculars and field guide. Remember to dress for the weather to experience this winter only event on the prairie.

Trapping Traditions

February 7 • Saturday • 3–4:30 PM
Walter Woods Conservation Area (Joplin)

Registration required (ages 7 and up)
Discover the heritage of trapping by learning the basics of how to prepare your furs to be sold or tanned. Finishing and drying your own hides can be a very fulfilling way to end your hunting and trapping season. We will cover what a buyer looks for in a quality hide, fleshing, cleaning, stretching, salting, and storing your hides. All equipment will be provided.

Discover Birds Program And The Great Backyard Bird Count

February 14 • Saturday • 10 AM–12 NOON
Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center (Joplin)

Call 417-782-6287 to register (ages 7 and up)

Do you know who the many winter guests are visiting our feeders? Join us to learn basic bird identification techniques, the fundamentals of binoculars, and navigating through field guides. We will discuss critical issues affecting birds and what we can do to help our feathered friends. Naturalists will then lead a hike outdoors for a chance to see and hear birds in their natural habitats through the park. Also discover how your entire family can participate at home in the annual *Great Backyard Bird Count*, February 13–16.

Raptors Rock

February 14 • Saturday • 1–2 PM
Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center (Joplin)

Call 417-782-6287 to register (all ages)

Raptors are the masters of the sky and include eagles, hawks, falcons, and owls. Pittsburg State University Nature Reach will display several live birds for your viewing pleasure. Don't miss these incredible hunters and your chance to learn about their role in nature. Be sure to bring your camera and discover why raptors rock!

Introduction To Trout Fishing

February 18 • Wednesday • 6–7:30 PM
Walter Woods Conservation Area (Joplin)

Registration required (ages 7 and up)
Have you ever wanted to go trout fishing but didn't know what to use or where to go? We will discuss locations to fish in southwest Missouri, essential equipment, basic fishing methods, lure selection, and how to handle, clean, and cook your catch. You will be ready to wet a hook on opening day March 1.

Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center

4897 N. Farm Road 61, Ash Grove, MO

65604 • mdc.mo.gov/node/288



January Events

Metallic And Shotgun Shell Reloading Basics

January 17 • Saturday • 8:30–11:30 AM

Registration required (ages 18 and up)

Now is the time to start saving money while having fun reloading your own ammunition for hunting or target shooting. Join us for this basic course about reloading rifle, pistol, and shotgun shell ammunition because you will have great satisfaction breaking targets or shooting bull's-eyes using your own manufactured rounds. We will cover all aspects of reloading from brass care and preparation to bullet and primer selection and much more.

Wintertime Rabbits

Winter provides us with some amazing opportunities to get outside and Discover Nature. One of my favorite wintertime activities is hunting for the eastern cottontail rabbit. If you are fortunate to have a pack of beagle hounds or hunt with someone who does, this activity rates very high in my book. Do not fret, however, if you do not have dogs. The snow tells a story about what nature has to offer in the area of table fare to harvest and enjoy. One of the things I enjoy doing is going out after a fresh snowfall to find rabbit tracks then follow that trail until I have a good idea about where my quarry is "holed" up. Many times you will find the tracks lead to brush piles where the rabbit has made a warmer and drier winter den and this makes for some good hunting. Experience has taught me that when you disturb the brush pile by kicking around the edges, the rabbit loses its nerve and makes a break to escape the danger. This is where your expert marksmanship skills come into play. While this may sound like an unfair advantage, I can assure you it is challenging for both hunter and rabbit alike. The Missouri rabbit season opens October 1 and ends February 15. You are currently allowed to have 6 in your daily bag with a total possession of 12 rabbits to be in compliance with the regulations. For more information about hunting rabbits, visit mdc.mo.gov/node/10814.

Once you harvest your rabbits, you must skin and clean them to maintain the quality of your food. I use an easy method for this. I simply pinch the back skin and make an incision through it large enough to insert my index fingers from both hands. I then pull the skin toward the opposite ends and use game shears to remove the feet and head just behind the neck. Next I wash off the remnant hair, make an incision up the belly, and remove the entrails. Once I get this done, I cut the rabbit up much like chicken and usually fry the rabbit just as I do chicken. You cannot find any cleaner food than the food you harvest and care for yourself. Wild game is very high in protein and low in fat and cholesterol so it makes for a healthy choice for feeding your family.

I hope you make time to get outside and try out this winter tracking method that many generations of Missourians have used to hunt rabbits. For more information about preparing your meal using rabbit, visit mdc.mo.gov/node/18568.

—Michael Brooks, Outdoor Education Center Supervisor



Look for tracks in the snow



To get to the Andy Dalton Shooting Range and Outdoor Education Center, take US Highway 160 west of Willard, turn south on Farm Road 61, and go 2.5 miles, facility on the west side of road. Facilities include an outdoor education center and archery, rifle, pistol, and shotgun ranges, including skeet and trap.

HOURS:

September 14–April 14

Monday and Thursday: 9 AM–4:30 PM

Friday–Sunday: 12 NOON–4:30 PM

April 15–September 13

Monday: 9 AM–4:30 PM

Thursday: 9 AM–7:30 PM

Friday–Sunday: 12 NOON–4:30 PM

Closed Tuesdays, Wednesdays and all state holidays. Hours are subject to change.

FACILITIES AND FEES:

Available for individual and group use. Call for information and possible restrictions.

- Rifle/pistol range fee: \$3 per booth per hour
- Trap/skeet range fee: \$3 per person per round of 25 clay targets
- Shotgun patterning range: \$3 per person per hour
- Archery range: \$3 per person per hour
- Group use fee: \$20 per hour plus \$3 per round of 25 clay targets

TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-742-4361 or email DaltonRange@mdc.mo.gov to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

Holiday

Closings:

January 1 • New Year's Day and January 19 • Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

February 12 • Lincoln Day and February 16 • Washington's Birthday

Springfield Conservation Nature Center

4601 S. Nature Center Way, Springfield, MO 65804 • mdc.mo.gov/node/287



The Springfield Conservation Nature Center is located in southeast Springfield just west of US-65 off the James River Freeway (US-60). Indoors, enjoy nature exhibits, attend programs, purchase hunting and fishing permits, browse through a nature-related gift shop, and pick up free conservation brochures. Outdoors, enjoy three miles of hiking trails through a variety of natural communities. Call to schedule a naturalist-led program for your organized group.

CURRENT HOURS:

November 1–February 28

Building: Tuesday–Saturday: 8 AM–5 PM
Closed Sunday and Monday

Trails: Sunday–Saturday: 8 AM–6 PM

CLOSED: NEW YEAR'S DAY

TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-888-4237 to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

Temporary Exhibits

January • Old Barns And Forgotten Charms
Photography by Stacy Shoemaker

February • Missouri Wild: Nature Photographs
Photography by David Stonner

January Events

Nature And The Arts: A Musical Evening With Carter And Connelley

January 9 • Friday • 7–8:30 PM

Registration begins December 16 (ages 12–adult)

Singer/songwriters Curt Carter and Tom Connelley have been performing and recording original acoustic guitar music highlighting their love of the natural world since 1988. Their music—ranging from rock to bluegrass—combined with spoken interludes, demonstrates their love of the earth and family. They are educators who share both a passion for and knowledge about nature. They call it “environmental music with a message.” You’ll call it fun and inspirational.

January Events

Digital Photography

January 10 • Saturday • 1–4 PM

Registration begins December 16 (ages 12–adult)

Join Volunteer Naturalist Bob Ball to learn how to use a digital camera for nature photography. Bring your camera for an outdoor shoot if weather permits.

Story Time With Ms. Ladybug

January 14 • Wednesday • 11–11:30 AM

No registration required (ages 2–6)

Join Volunteer Naturalist Joyce Tolliver as she reads a nature story and shares activities with your 2–6 year olds. Please, no organized groups.

Eagle Days

January 17 • Saturday • 9 AM–4 PM

January 18 • Sunday • 12:30–4:30 PM

No registration required (all ages)

We’re celebrating the annual return of bald eagles to Lake Springfield. This special event includes the indoor presence of Phoenix, a live bald eagle from Dickerson Park Zoo. Programs will be held in the nature center auditorium every hour on the hour from 9 am to 3 pm on Saturday and at 12:30, 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30 pm on Sunday. Stop by anytime and plan to spend about two hours. Opportunities to view bald eagles in the wild, with the assistance of volunteers and spotting scopes, will be available at the Lake Springfield Boathouse and Marina during event hours.

Badge Bonanza

January 20 • Tuesday • 6:30–8 PM

Registration begins January 2 (ages 6–adult)

Attention all scouting and youth organizations! Here’s a program to help you earn nature badges. The focus will be on venomous snakes, conservation careers, and knot tying. Program is also open to the public.

You Got Game?

January 22 • Thursday • 7–9 PM

Registration begins January 2 (ages 5–adult)

Learn how to care for game taken from the field and then prepare it for the table. Taste samples of wild game from fish to venison. Copies of our favorite recipes will be available. Come enjoy a wild game taste-testing treat.

Owl Prowl And Evening Stroll

January 23 • Friday • 6–9 PM

No registration required (all ages)

Nesting season comes early for owls and they’re already hooting in anticipation. The trails will be open and patrolled, so bring a flashlight and a walking partner because you’re on your own. Dickerson Park Zoo docents will offer two indoor owl programs at 6:30 and 7:30 pm.

Hiking Club

January 24 • Saturday • 8:15 AM–3 PM

Registration begins January 2 (ages 18–adult)

Take a winter hike this month with Volunteer Naturalist Carmen Hallock at Talbot Conservation Area. Meet at the nature center and carpool. Bring a sack lunch and water and wear comfortable hiking shoes. **Hike is approximately 4 miles in length and rated as moderate in difficulty.**

Nature Art With A Chinese Brushstroke

January 24 • Saturday • 1–2:30 PM (ages 8–adult)

2:45–4:15 PM (ages 15–adult)

Registration begins January 2

Art instructor and nature enthusiast Hing Wah Hatch will increase your powers of observation as she demonstrates, step-by-step, how to capture the essence of local plants and animals through Chinese-style painting. Participants will go home with more nature knowledge and their own artistic masterpieces.

Fly-Tying Demonstration

January 24 • Saturday • 1–4 PM

No registration required (all ages)

Members of the Missouri Trout Fishermen’s Association will be on hand to demonstrate basic fly-tying techniques. Stop by anytime and learn how combinations of feathers, yarn, and thread can imitate insects or other food that will fool a fish.

A Walk On The Wild Side—Long Distance Backpacking For Beginners

January 29 • Thursday • 7–9 PM

Registration begins January 2 (ages 15–adult)

Long before the movie *Wild*—based on author Cheryl Strayed’s adventurous solo backpacking trip on the Pacific Crest Trail—was released, Volunteer Naturalist Debbie Good was a solo long-distance hiker. In fact, Debbie has logged more than 1,800 backpacking miles, most of them on solo journeys. If you’ve been inspired to try long distance backpacking, Debbie has the answers. The first hour will cover the basics of planning and executing a successful long distance trip while the second hour will be devoted more toward the nuances of backpacking as a woman.


Conservation TEEN Club: Fly-Tying

January 30 • Friday • 6:30–8:30 PM

Registration begins January 2 (ages 12–17)

Join us for a fly-tying presentation. The Missouri Trout Fishermen’s Association will be our guest presenters and teach us how to tie flies. You will be able to keep the flies you tie and use them fly-fishing next year! Snacks and drinks provided.

January **Little Acorns** programs are listed on page 5.

We are inviting everyone—families and individuals of all ages—to participate in *Your Big Year* to identify and learn more about Missouri birds. Look for this symbol for bird-related programs. 

February Events

Conservation TEEN Club: Bird Hike

February 7 • Saturday • 10 AM–3 PM 

Registration begins January 15 (ages 12–17)

Join us for a birding hike at Busiek State Forest and Wildlife Area. Drinks, lunch, and transportation will be provided.

The Big Year: A Kickoff To Learning Birds

 February 7 • Saturday • 7–9 PM

Registration begins January 15 (ages 10–adult)

Help us start the nature center's *Your Big Year* campaign to encourage everyone to learn more about the birds around them with this special showing of the 100-minute film *The Big Year*. Three competitors embark on a 365-day marathon of bird watching as they try to identify the most birds based on this mostly true 1998 adventure. Pick up entry information and learn how you and your family can **Discover Nature** together while identifying birds through our much milder version of *Your Big Year*. This film is rated PG.

Attracting Birds To Your Yard

February 10 • Tuesday • 6:30–7:30 PM 

Registration begins January 15 (ages 6 and up with an adult mentor)

Parents, grandparents, and adult mentors, bring your youngster(s) to learn how to attract birds to your yard, how to identify them, and then work together to assemble your own bird feeder to take home (one per family).

Story Time With Ms. Ladybug

February 11 • Wednesday • 11–11:30 AM

No registration required (ages 2–6)

Join Volunteer Naturalist Joyce Tolliver as she reads a nature story and shares activities with your 2–6 year olds. Please, no organized groups.

The Great Backyard Bird Count

February 13 • Friday • 9–11 AM

February 14 • Saturday • 9–11 AM

No registration required (all ages)

Stop by and help count birds in the Wildlife Viewing Area with members of the Greater Ozarks Audubon Society. Learn the basics of identification and how to count birds to contribute to the nature center's *Great Backyard Bird Count* tally sheet.

Nature And The Arts–Missouri Wild Nature Photography By David Stonner

February 13 • Friday • 7–8 PM

Registration begins January 15 (ages 12–adult)

David Stonner, whose stunning photos grace the pages of the *Missouri Conservationist* magazine, has been a photographer with the Conservation Department since 2007. After starting his photography career at the *Joplin Globe* newspaper, he pursued his passion for conservation and nature photography. David will share some of his favorite images as well as sharing information about what being a nature photographer entails. View David's photography on display at the nature center during the month of February.

Missouri Birds–Identifying Birds Of Western Missouri

February 19 • Thursday • 7–8 PM

Registration begins January 15 (ages 7–adult)

John C. Robinson began birding in Missouri in 1980 and is a 2011 Toyota-TogetherGreen Fellow. An award-winning ornithologist and best-selling author, he has led bird-watching and natural history tours in the United States and exotic locations. He will share his experiences as a beginning birder in northwest Missouri, discuss his current work with Toyota and National Audubon that helps connect minority and inner city youth and young adults with nature, and review key techniques for identifying the birds of western Missouri by sight and by sound. This program is cosponsored by the Greater Ozarks Audubon Society.

BIRDS–Your Gateway To The Natural Wonders Of The World

February 20 • Friday • 7–8:45 PM 

Registration begins January 15 (ages 10–adult)

Professional ornithologist and two-time #1 best-selling author John C. Robinson is world-renowned for helping nature enthusiasts, young and old alike, to appreciate birds, nature, and the outdoors. John's unique combination of breath-taking photographs, fun biology lessons, personal stories, and humor has helped hundreds of thousands of birders worldwide to improve their bird identification skills. Discover new opportunities for nature exploration in your backyard, a local park or forest, or on exotic lands in another country! Be sure to bring your most burning bird questions so you can participate in the popular "Ask the Bird Man!" session that is part of this special presentation.

Conservation Kids' Club Missouri's Lost Birds

February 26 • Thursday • 6:30–7:45 PM

Registration begins February 3 (ages 7–12)

Have you ever seen a parakeet or a passenger pigeon in the wild? While your answer is "no" since these birds are now extinct, they were once common in Missouri. Discover the stories behind the loss of these fascinating birds.

Owl Prowl

February 27 • Friday • 7–8:30 PM

Registration begins February 3 (all ages)

Nesting season comes early for owls and they're already hooting in anticipation. Dickerson Park Zoo will join us for a close-up look at live owls. We'll also head outside and try to call wild owls during a guided hike. Bring a flashlight.

For Adults Only And Hiking Club Orienteering

February 28 • Saturday • 8 AM–5 PM

Registration begins February 3 (ages 18–adult)

Learn the basics of using a compass and topographic maps during the indoor portion of this program. After lunch, we'll test your newfound orienteering skills at Bois D'Arc Conservation Area. Bring a sack lunch and water and wear comfortable hiking shoes. **Hike is approximately 4 miles and rated moderate in difficulty.**

Bird Banding

February 28 • Saturday • 10 AM–2 PM

No registration required (all ages)

Here is your chance to see some of our avian friends up close! Join us for a winter bird banding demonstration with the Missouri River Bird Observatory. Birds will be captured around the feeding stations and then banded in a location for easy viewing. Stop by anytime.

Little Acorns

Please limit to one per month.

Programs are 45 minutes in length.

January Events

Registration begins January 2 (ages 3–6)

Regal Eagles

January 9 • Friday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM

January 10 • Saturday • 11 AM

Bald eagles are the kings of the sky. Learn the adaptations that make these birds like royalty.

Terrific Trout

January 24 • Saturday • 11 AM

January 29 • Thursday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM

Take a journey through the trout's life cycle and learn how to catch these terrific and tasty fish.

February Events

Registration begins February 3 (ages 3–6)

Greet The Groundhog

February 6 • Friday • 11 AM

February 7 • Saturday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM

Will spring be early or late? Only the shadow knows. Come out to learn about groundhogs and their shadows.

Backyard Birds

February 12 • Thursday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM

Birds are fun to watch! Learn the calls of several birds, how to attract them, and how your family can participate in the *Great Backyard Bird Count*.

Skunk Scurry

February 19 • Thursday • 11 AM or 1:30 PM

February 21 • Saturday • 11 AM

There's more to a skunk than its smell. "Sniff out" some amazing facts, learn a pre-spray skunk "dance," and take home a craft that won't stink.

Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery and Conservation Center

483 Hatchery Road, Branson, MO 65616 • mdc.mo.gov/node/290



The Fish Hatchery and Conservation Center is located on 221 acres in Branson off Highway 165 next to Table Rock Dam. Outdoors, visitors will experience an active fish hatchery with 700,000 rainbow and brown trout in 30 pools with opportunities to feed the fish. Indoors, enjoy a 3,500 gallon aquarium and hands-on nature exhibits and purchase hunting and fishing permits. The area also features four hiking trails, a picnic area, a boat ramp, and access to Lake Taneycomo.

FACILITY HOURS:

Memorial Day–Labor Day

Sunday–Saturday: 9 AM–6 PM

Remainder of Year

Sunday–Saturday: 9 AM–5 PM

CLOSED: NEW YEAR'S DAY

AREA AND TRAIL HOURS:

4 AM–10 PM

The area is open to fishing 24 hours daily, but special permits and regulations do apply. Check the current fishing regulations or call for details.

TO REGISTER FOR A PROGRAM:

Programs are free. Call 417-334-4865, Ext. 0, to sign up for a program requiring registration. If you are unable to attend a program, please call and cancel as a courtesy to those on the waiting list.

FISHING

LAKE TANEYCOMO:

Before fishing on Lake Taneycomo, become familiar with the regulations and restrictions. Come by for a free brochure of the entire lake including fishing accesses. For specific details about trout fishing here and across the state, visit mdc.mo.gov/node/5603.

January and February Events

Owl Prowl

January 16 • Friday • 7–9 PM

Registration required (families)

Here is your chance to learn more about our often misunderstood owls. In addition to learning about some myths and legends, you will also learn what makes owls such great nighttime hunters. Dress for the weather because the program involves a night hike to “call” to owls. Snacks and hot chocolate will be provided after the night hike.

The Story Of Snow

January 31 • Saturday • 10–11:30 AM

Registration required (families)

This program takes a look at the magic of snowflakes—how and why they form, how to catch them, and how animals deal with them. Enjoy crafts to make snowflakes and snowman soup.

Vulture Venture

February 21 • Saturday • 12 NOON–5 PM

No registration required (all ages)

This is our 19th annual event that features the incredibly unique vultures in our area. Here is your



opportunity to see one of the largest winter roosts of vultures in the state. The event includes hourly presentations featuring “Socrates,” a live turkey vulture from the WOW Museum in Springfield. There will also be indoor games, trivia, and activities.

Outdoors you will get to see wild vultures roosting near the hatchery. Staff and volunteers will help you view the vultures with spotting scopes. The last presentation begins at 4 p.m.

Winter Trout Fishing Opportunities

Even though the conditions can be challenging during the winter, trout fishing is still just as exciting now as during the rest of the year. There are several places in southwest Missouri that are available to fish for trout this winter to hone your skills, especially before the March 1 season opener at the four Missouri trout parks. These include lakes, parks, and streams that are managed for winter trout fishing opportunities.

Check out the specific regulations before fishing at any of the following locations.

Lakes: Taneycomo is one of the few lakes that supports trout fishing all year long. Many trout fishermen prepare for the March 1 trout season opener by fishing there in February. Special regulations apply.

Parks: Bennett Spring State Park and Roaring River State Park offer catch-and-release trout fishing from November 14 through February 9.

Streams: Niangua River, Shoal Creek, Capps Creek, and Crane Creek are premier trout fishing locations that are open all year. Special regulations apply.

So don't let winter slow you down. Enjoy great winter trout fishing opportunities because southwest Missouri is a great place to hunt and fish.

For more information about winter trout fishing and places to fish for trout visit mdc.mo.gov/node/5603.

—John Miller, Interpretive Center Manager

Winter Catch-and-Release Trout Fishing

Catch-and-release fishing only is available from November 14, 2014, through February 9, 2015, at Bennett Spring, Montauk, and Roaring River State Parks. Fishing times are from 8 AM to 4 PM on Friday through Monday.

A fishing permit, unless exempt, and a trout permit are required. Only flies may be used.





Listen for the barred owl's hooting call: "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?"

Owls In Winter

The more you learn about owls, the more you'll be amazed and intrigued by these primarily nocturnal birds. Owls are active throughout the year, but winter is when most owl species begin courtship and nesting. Consequently, from now until early spring is a good time to hear owls.

Several owl traits are impressive. For instance, an owl's range of head motion is greater than most vertebrates (approximately 270 degrees). This high degree of turning ability is a compensation for the fact that an owl's eyes are fixed in their sockets. Unlike humans, owls can't move their eyes from side to side and, as a result, they must turn their entire heads when they want to visually inspect something.

The feather tufts sticking up from the head of some species of owls are not ears. An owl's ear openings are within its facial disc—the round portion around its eyes. An owl's facial disc focuses sound waves into its ears. The right ear opening is higher than the left, providing owls with sort of a

"three-dimensional" hearing ability. This trait helps owls locate prey in total darkness by hearing alone.

Owls are also highly efficient predators and can be beneficial to humans. The remains of 1,987 field mice, 656 house mice, and 210 rats were found at a location where owls had been. However, their predation skills have little to do with why many people like hearing owl calls. A big reason an owl's call is such an attention-getter is that it's rarely heard by most people. Not that owls are rare—on the contrary—several species are found in Missouri. It's just that owls are out and about when most humans are inside and in bed. However, if you want to try to hear one, now is a good time to start listening.

If you're lucky enough to find an owl perching site, you may find owl pellets. (Old barns and other abandoned structures are good places to look.) Most owls produce one- to two-inch pellets that are by-products of their eating habits. Smaller creatures, such as mice and small birds, are swallowed whole by the owl during a night of hunting. Hours later, indigestible bones, fur, and feathers are coughed up in firm, cylindrical pellets. Sometimes, an abundance of these can be found at a site where an owl roosts or takes shelter.

—Francis Skalicky, Media Specialist

Hunter Education Sessions

Classroom Sessions

Location

Date/Time

Springfield Conservation Nature Center February 6 • Friday • 6–10 PM

Skills Sessions

Location

Date/Time

Andy Dalton Shooting Range January 3 • Saturday • 8 AM–12 NOON

February 7 • Saturday • 8 AM–12 NOON

Springfield Conservation Nature Center February 14 • Saturday • 8 AM–12 NOON

February 14 • Saturday • 1–5 PM

Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center January 26 • Monday • 6–10 PM

February 19 • Thursday • 6–10 PM

Visit mdc.mo.gov/node/3722 to register for these sessions and to check for session changes and/or additions.



The Southwest Regional Office is conveniently located just west of the intersection of US-65 and Kearney in Springfield. The public may obtain information on land management, nuisance wildlife, educational opportunities, river and pond management, and more, as well as purchase hunting and fishing permits and obtain area brochures for Conservation Department areas.

HOURS: Monday–Friday: 8 AM–5 PM
Closed all state holidays

PHONE: 417-895-6880

Elk Driving Tour

Winter is an excellent time to take an elk-viewing trip to Peck Ranch Conservation Area in south-central Missouri. More than 100 elk reside on this Missouri Department of Conservation area that encompasses more than 23,000 acres in Shannon and Carter counties. A self-guided driving tour begins at the Peck Ranch Conservation Area office and winds through part of the area. Visitors can't be guaranteed of seeing elk, but the tour is a beautiful drive through fields, forests, and glades where you can also see deer and other wildlife. Feel free to take photographs and to get out of your vehicle for a better view—but please do not disturb the elk or other wildlife in any way. For more information, call the Peck Ranch Conservation Area, 573-323-4249, or the Missouri Department of Conservation's Ozark Regional Office in West Plains, 417-256-7161. Information on the elk tour can also be found at mdc.mo.gov/node/15985.

Project FeederWatch

January 13–14 • January 27–28
February 10–11 • February 24–25
March 10–11 • March 24–25
9 AM–4 PM

Drop by the Springfield Conservation Nature Center and help volunteer naturalists count birds in the Wildlife Viewing Area. The nature center participates every November–March in this winter-long survey of birds sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. Learn how you can participate too!



Great Backyard Bird Count

February 13–16

By participating in this joint project of Cornell University Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, you can help document where birds are and track changes in their numbers compared to previous years, helping scientists determine the status of birds this winter. You can count birds in your backyard, a local park, or other natural areas on one or all count days. Visit birdsource.org/gbbc/ or visit the Springfield Conservation Nature Center or Joplin Office in the Wildcat Glades Conservation & Audubon Center for further information.

Eagle Days Events



Stella

January 24 • Saturday

10 AM–3 PM

Stella Veteran's Memorial Park

See page 2 for details.

Springfield

January 17 • Saturday • 9 AM–4 PM

January 18 • Sunday • 12:30–4:30 PM

Springfield Conservation Nature Center

See page 5 for details.

Conservation Showcase:

Birding at Table Rock and Taneycomo Lakes

When a person thinks of bird watching in the wintertime, the image that might pop into mind is standing inside a warm house looking out at the bird feeder. For many amateurs and professionals, however, winter is a great time to bundle up and venture outdoors in search of birding opportunities.

The best place to look for birds during cold months is near open water. Large lakes and flowing rivers attract a variety of birds. This makes winter an ideal time for watching eagles, herons, ducks, gulls, and shorebirds. Unlike the birds at your backyard feeder, these species rely on aquatic plants and animals as their food source. In southwest Missouri, Table Rock and Taneycomo Lakes are popular destinations for birders during winter.

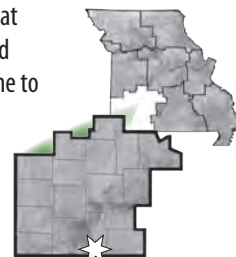


Table Rock Lake is 40 miles south of Springfield. The lake was formed in 1958 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed damming the White River. Table Rock Lake spans Barry, Stone, and Taney counties, as well as parts of Arkansas. Opportunities to bird on Table Rock are plentiful—there are over 150 campsites around the lake, both private and public. Boating, canoeing, and kayaking are great ways to see birds. Near Branson, Table Rock State Park has over 8 miles of hiking trails with a variety of natural communities, from bottom woodlands to dry dolomite glades.

From November to mid-May, more than 2,000 bald eagles are reported in Missouri and Table Rock Lake is one of the top destinations for viewing bald eagles in the state. They roost in riparian trees such as sycamores and cottonwoods and feed on fish and carrion. Nesting behavior begins in January when they begin constructing impressively-sized nests (average 5 feet wide and 3 feet deep) in tall trees near water. Two to three eggs are laid in March or April. Arrive in the early morning to your chosen location to have the best chance at spotting one of these magnificent birds. Common loons and several grebe species can be seen on Table Rock during the winter. Occasionally, there is a chance that unusual species will drop by for a visit. Pacific loons, red-throated loons, horned grebes, and western grebes have also been seen in the Table Rock State Park area.

Lake Taneycomo was dammed earlier in 1913 and was originally a warm water lake. Now it is fed by the bottom tail water of Table Rock. Due to this, it has the characteristics of both a river and a lake. When the dam is generating power, the water flows fast and the temperature drops, giving it the features of a river. Taneycomo is located in southern Taney County. Below the dam and nearby the Table Rock State Park is Shepherd of The Hills Fish Hatchery. There are several trails available, viewing blinds and decks, and a 3-acre waterfowl pond near the lake. Also on Taneycomo is Ozark Beach Recreation Area near Forsyth. While it is used mainly as a fishing access, there is a half-mile of shoreline access and a campground nearby. Species commonly seen at Lake Taneycomo in winter are bald eagles, ospreys, pied-billed grebes, common loons, and great blue herons. Gull species can also be seen, such as Bonaparte's gull and the ring-billed gull.

It is easy to get started birding. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a bird guide. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) offers some birding checklists—these can be printed from the website mdc.mo.gov for specific areas. MDC also offers a 40-page booklet, *Enjoying Missouri's Birds*. Included in the booklet is information about how to identify birds, where to find them, information about binoculars, and easy to understand graphs about when to expect certain species to be in Missouri. You can pick up this publication at a MDC office or nature center near you.

Birding is not only a great sport and a pastime—it is also a way for you to help with wildlife conservation by participating in the Christmas Bird Count. When combined with other bird surveys, such as the Breeding Bird Survey, the data provides researchers with long-term perspective on the health and status of North American bird populations. Birds are early indicators of environmental problems that can affect people. The count begins on December 14 and ends on January 5. If you are a beginner, you can join a group with an experienced birder. To find out how you can participate in the Christmas Bird Count, visit the Audubon website at birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count.

For more eagle viewing, make sure to attend an *Eagle Days* event, where you can see a live bald eagle up close. For dates and locations, visit the MDC website at mdc.mo.gov.

—Kearby Bridges, Conservation Agent